

Report

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks

■ 1.0 Site Description

Giant sequoia trees are the world's largest living things. Sequoia National Park, located near Visalia and Fresno, California, is the second-oldest National Park in the United States. It was established in 1890 to protect the Big Trees in the Giant Forest, including the General Sherman Tree, the world's largest tree. Sequoia also contains the Mineral King Valley and a rare expanse of undisturbed Sierra Nevada foothills. Mount Whitney, the highest mountain in the continental United States, towers along the eastern boundary.

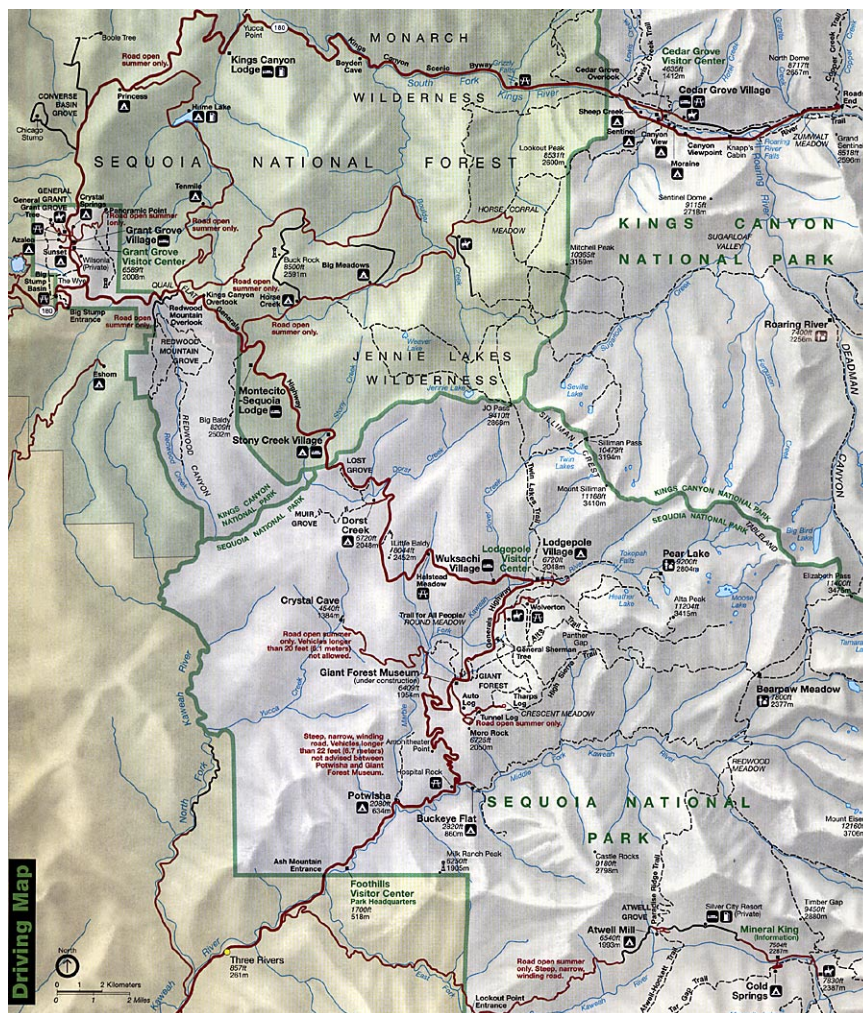
A small portion of what is now Kings Canyon was set aside originally in 1890 as General Grant National Park. In 1940, General Grant was absorbed into the new and larger Kings Canyon National Park, which eventually grew to include the South Fork of the Kings River and approximately 457,000 acres of backcountry wilderness. Managed as one park, together Sequoia and Kings Canyon total over 863,000 acres. Figure 1 shows a map of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. Figure 2 shows a more detailed driving map of the western portions of the Parks.

Sequoia and Kings Canyon contain the following visitor centers:

- **Foothills Visitor Center.** This is the Park headquarters, and is located at the Ash Mountain Entrance to Sequoia. It is the closest visitor center to Visalia. It is open year-round.
- **Grant Grove Visitor Center.** This is located near the Big Stump Entrance to Kings Canyon. It is the closest visitor center to Fresno. It is open year-round.
- **Cedar Grove Visitor Center.** This is located at the bottom of Kings Canyon. It is open between late May and September.
- **Lodgepole Visitor Center.** This is located a few miles from Giant Forest. It is open between April and early November.
- **Mineral King Visitor Center.** This is located east of the Lookout Point Entrance to Sequoia in the Mineral King Valley of the Kaweah River. It is open between June and Labor Day.

Figure 1. Map of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks

SR-198 connects the Ash Mountain Entrance with Visalia. SR-180 connects the Big Stump Entrance with Fresno and the bottom of Kings Canyon. Generals Highway connects the Ash Mountain and Big Stump Entrances and the two major park attractions: Giant Forest and General Grant Grove. Near Giant Forest are the General Sherman Tree, Crystal Cave, Moro Rock, Crescent Meadow, Auto Log, Tunnel Log and several trails. Near General Grant Grove are General Grant Tree, Big Stump Basin, Panoramic Point, Kings Canyon Overlook, Redwood Mountain Grove, and several trails. Between Giant Forest and General Grant Grove are Wolverton, Lodgepole, Wuksachi Village, and other locations offering food, shops, picnicking, lodging, camping, and horseback riding. The bottom of Kings Canyon (Cedar Grove area) includes Canyon View, Knapp's Cabin, Roaring River Falls, Zumwalt Meadow, and several campgrounds and trails.

Figure 2. Driving Map of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks

Annual visitation for Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks is approximately 1,500,000 persons. Annual visitation has remained steady throughout the 1990s, but is expected to increase by 23 percent between 1997 and 2010. The peak visitation months are July and August. Peak days are on weekends. Approximately 68 percent of visitors make visits of one day or less during the summer. The equivalent figure for the winter is approximately 86 percent. More than half of all visitors stop at only one major attraction area, such as the Giant Forest area. Of those visitors entering and exiting at Ash Mountain and Big Stump Entrances, approximately 56 percent enter or exit at Ash Mountain and approximately 44 percent enter or exit at Big Stump.

The current park Master Plan was developed in 1971. A General Management Plan (GMP) is in progress.

General transportation problems identified by Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks staff include:

- There is a finite capacity for roadways and parking lots. These are at capacity at certain times.
- There is little public support for additional roadways, parking spaces/lots, or public transportation.
- Despite relatively steady levels of visitation during the 1990s, projected growth in the Fresno/Visalia area is expected to lead to increased visitation, which is expected to lead to increased traffic and parking congestion.

Specific transportation problems also exist, identified by park staff and a previous study. These include:

- Along Generals Highway between Potwisha Campground and Giant Forest, the grade averages six percent. This is difficult for large vehicles, such as recreational vehicles (RV) and tour buses. Their presence can cause congestion and accidents. Vehicles longer than 22 feet are not advised to use this roadway section, and vehicles longer than 40 feet are not allowed.
- There is severe parking congestion in the Giant Forest area at certain times, particularly at General Sherman Tree. Also, during the summer, roadways in the Giant Forest and General Grant Grove areas, and along Generals Highway between these areas, experience peak-hour congestion at certain times.
- There are no connections to the parks for visitors arriving by airplane or train in nearby cities.

■ 2.0 Existing ATS

There is one current alternative transportation system (ATS) within Sequoia. A bus shuttle system operates between late June and early September between Giant Forest and Wuksachi Village, serving Crescent Meadow, Moro Rock, General Sherman Tree, Wolverton, and Lodgepole Village. During 1999, the system carried approximately 17,000 visitors, averaging 235 visitors per day. The service has operated since 1994 by the park concessionaire, is free of charge, and voluntary. Fares are being considered for implementation in 2000.

■ 3.0 ATS Needs

Potential ATS needs identified by park staff and a previous study include:

- Increasing frequency of existing bus shuttle system;
- A new shuttle system serving the General Grant Grove area as visitation increases; and
- An expanded existing or new shuttle system serving all points along Generals Highway between Ash Mountain Entrance and the General Grant Grove area.

■ 4.0 Basis of ATS Needs

The potential ATSs identified above would have the following benefit:

- Congestion potentially could be alleviated along Generals Highway, including the steep section between Potwisha Campground and Giant Forest, the Giant Forest area, the General Grant Grove area, and other locations along Generals Highway.

The benefits of either of these potential ATSs would need to be weighed against capital and maintenance costs of the systems, resource issues involving the operation and maintenance of the ATSs, and inconvenience to visitors. There is no space in the General Grant Grove area for additional transportation facilities. Such facilities would need to be built at least 15 miles outside the Park. Currently, most visitors enter at either Ash Mountain or Big Stump Entrance Stations, drive along Generals Highway to the other entrance station, and leave the Park. For example, most visitors coming from Visalia enter at Ash Mountain Entrance Station, drive northbound along Generals Highway, and exit at Big Stump Entrance Station on their way to Fresno. A mandatory shuttle system could cause time delays to visitors and discourage visitation.

■ 5.0 Bibliography

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks Official Map and Guide. National Park Service. 1998.

The Sequoia Bark – Summer 1999 Park & Forest Guide.

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks Digital Maps. National Park Service Web Site. November 16, 1999.

The Sequoia Bark – A Guide: Winter 1999 – 2000.

■ 6.0 Persons Interviewed

Peggy Williams, Concession Program Manager, Bill Tweed, Chief of Interpretation, and Dave Graber, Scientist, Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. Telephone conversation. November 22, 1999.